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from MANAGER'S PUBLIC RELATIONS HANDBOOK  
by Sperber and Lerbinger 1982

## PREPARING FOR A NEW PLANT

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When an organization constructs or opens a new plant or facility in a community, a process of social change and accommodation is begun that holds important opportunities—and possible problems—for both the organization and the community. The significance of the impact depends, of course, on the size of the facility relative to the size of the community and whether the community has previously experienced such growth.

**SOCIAL BENEFITS AND COSTS** Some individuals and groups in a community usually welcome growth while others become apprehensive. Part of the community's reaction depends on what the perceived benefits and costs are. Therefore, an organization must prepare a kind of economic and social impact statement that lists the pluses and honestly talks about the negatives and what it is doing to minimize them. Some of the typical or possible benefits and costs are:

- Benefits
- ▶ New jobs.
- ▶ New payroll adds to community purchasing power.
- ▶ New tax source.

Acceptance

**PREPARING FOR A NEW PLANT**

- ▶ Local purchases by the organization.
- ▶ Attractive buildings and landscaping.
- ▶ New community resources, e.g., professional manpower.

**Costs**

- ▶ Increased traffic.
- ▶ Need to expand schools and other community services.
- ▶ Pollution.
- ▶ Unwanted types of residents.

When zoning ordinance changes or other requests must first be approved by a community before an organization can plan to move into it, a form of negotiations takes place. The community searches for ways of reducing or eliminating the social costs while trying to increase the social benefits. Often, an organization can make reasonable concessions. For example, the Air Force avoided flights on Sundays during church hours, and a manufacturing plant staggered its working hours to ease the flow of traffic. Even after a facility is established, new problems are worked out with the community.

**PROVIDING REASSURANCES** Another part of a community's reaction to a new facility is based on the fear of change. It upsets community equilibrium and endangers familiar ways of doing things. Fears are usually exaggerated because they are based on fragmentary knowledge and rumors. Some of the techniques of squelching rumors must therefore be employed:

- ▶ Establish an information center (usually the public information office of the incoming organization).
- ▶ Be alert to misinformation about your organization.
- ▶ Conduct a community survey, if justified.
- ▶ Spike the rumor with accurate, reliable information to those groups where rumor exists.
- ▶ Assign one person as the spokesperson for the organization.
- ▶ Hold meetings with special groups, e.g.,  
Local personnel managers who may be concerned about new pattern of wages and benefits.  
Local school officials and teachers who may worry about influx of new students.

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**GETTING ACQUAINTED** The community relations objective of opening a new plant or facility is to get to know your new neighbors and to let them get to know you. An organization has to initiate a lot of information exchange and, even more important, get involved in the community. The responsibilities of being a community citizen have to be accepted.

Some standard procedures for becoming better acquainted are:

- ▶ Identify your new neighbors. Get to know something about them.
- ▶ A door-to-door survey of close neighbors—and a sample of others in the community—is a good way to know what people think about you. Give special attention to community leaders. They are most concerned and influential.
- ▶ Introduce yourself to the local media.
- ▶ Hold a dedication ceremony that involves:
  - Meeting (and, in most cases, a luncheon) with community leaders.
  - Open house for general public.
  - Special event for new employees and their families. (Note: If necessary, schedule a separate day for each of these events.)
- ▶ Join local organizations.
- ▶ Create a community council that meets regularly.

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Preparing for a New Plant	Assigned to	Date/Time Assigned	Date/Time Completed
I. Check with the real property manager, the proposed new plant manager, and CEO as to where the plant will be located and all factual material as to location selection.	_____	_____	_____
II. Determine the local public attitude through door-to-door interviews of area residents.	_____	_____	_____
1. Notify local political leaders in advance.			
2. Identify opinion leaders for the neighborhood as well as the town.			
Include:			
a. Traffic officer.			
b. Highway users to school.			
c. Other area road users.			
d. Environmental group heads.			
e. Beneficiaries (merchants, suppliers).			
f. Police and fire department heads.			
III. Visit pertinent news media—print and electronic—which cover the proposed area.	_____	_____	_____
IV. Check with real property manager and appropriate town officers as to existing zoning bylaws and/or modifications.	_____	_____	_____
1. If modifications in the bylaws are required, public hearings must be held.			
2. If the above step is required, clearly state the company's position and commitment regarding the benefits to the town on CEO's signature. Notify local news media.			
3. At public hearings, have CEO or designated spokesman make no commitments which cannot be kept.			
V. When the above is completed, present architectural elevations together with physical data—such as employment and payroll figures—to the townspeople through the local media.	_____	_____	_____

(continued)

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Preparing for a New Plant	Assigned to	Date/Time Assigned	Date/Time Completed
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pay special attention to potential violations of the visual and physical environment. Take steps to mitigate any controversial or provocative aspects.</li> <li>2. Consider plantings, lowering of roof line, accommodating architectural style of the neighborhood.</li> </ol>			
VI. Prepare a statement of total cost of construction, the amount to be spent with local contractors and suppliers, the number of people you will hire, and the impact on the income and tax base of the community. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Include statements by the local economic development commission chairperson and his on her opposite number at state levels.</li> </ol>	_____	_____	_____
VII. Arrange for the soil-breaking ceremony and the presence of VIP's and townspeople. In each case a senior member of management must be present. The press should be encouraged to use photos and TV cameras. Emphasize the contract for landscaping and planting.	_____	_____	_____
VIII. Announce a date for plant opening and ceremonies.	_____	_____	_____